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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MUSCAT 000873

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KTIP](#) [IR](#) [PK](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS TO OMAN - VOYAGE, INTERDICTION AND
REPATRIATION

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C: 073109 CRAVEN-TAYLOR EMAIL

CLASSIFIED BY: L. Victor Hurtado, CdA, Department of State, Embassy
Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Smuggling routes from South Asia through Iran and by water into Oman is the primary northern route of introducing illegal immigrants into Oman. Pakistan has allocated a full time federal law enforcement official at its embassy in Muscat to investigate and address this issue. He reports that his interaction with Omani officials is generally positive and that Oman pays to repatriate all illegal immigrants to their country of origin. As most victims of trafficking in Oman are exploited after their arrival here, this collaboration stems the flow of one of the key sources of potential victims. The Inspector General of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has told the embassy that, given the troubled nature of the region, illegal immigration is the largest day-to-day security threat facing Oman. This as well as other security concerns were a driving force in the signing of a security agreement between Oman and Iran earlier this summer. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Local press reported on August 8 that 88 illegal immigrants were arrested during the period July 26-31 in various regions of Oman and would be processed at the nearest ROP station. Human smugglers use two primary routes to bring their illicit cargo to the sprawling Omani coast which is equal to sailing from Maine to North Carolina. The northern route via Iran brings in illegals from Pakistan while the southern route serves to deposit illegal Somalis and Yemeni on Omani shores. Most illegal immigrants see Oman as a transit point in their pursuit of their final destination: work in Dubai. Further reporting on August 11 out of Islamabad noted that 10 Pakistani job seekers were arrested on a ship going to Oman and that the incident was being investigated. This information was public confirmation of information developed in recent meetings with South Asian Embassy officials.

Meetings with Pakistani Immigration Official

13. (C) Khalid Mahmood, Immigration Counsellor at the Pakistani Embassy, met with ConOff on April 19 to describe the work he is doing in Oman and requested a meeting with USG TIP reporting officer to discuss TIP definitions and the merits of the program Mahmood is running in Oman. In a meeting with the TIP officer on July 19th and a follow-up meeting on August 3, Mahmood, who is a law enforcement officer working for the Pakistan Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), explained that he is the only officer of his type posted to any Pakistani Embassy abroad. His primary focus is on Pakistani immigration and illegal trafficking. His role is to interview every illegal immigrant detained by Omani officials and determine if the individual was trafficked, and the transit routes and agents involved in moving the illegal immigrant into Oman. Information he gathers in the interviews is used to

track exploitive recruitment and smuggling operations in Pakistan and Iran and to prosecute those responsible. He thought that his collaboration with Omani officials was effective and the Omani Government was "happy with him."

Pakistan to "Dubai" (Sohar, Oman)

14. (C) According to Mahmood, most Pakistanis enter Oman illegally by sea, as his work with Omani officials has completely eradicated illegal Pakistani immigration by air into Oman. He outlined the following process that has been described to him during his extensive interviews. Potential Pakistani illegal immigrants learn of the Iranian route through returned villagers. They then travel to Baluchistan and the border with Iran where, in an undocumented transaction, they pay 30,000 to 40,000 Pakistani rupees (US\$ 260-480) for an agent to smuggle them over the Iranian border and onto the remote Konarak coast, 150 miles from the town of Jask, which is the closest city with access to roads. The agents tend to be a small number of Pakistani and Iranian families that live close to the border and are related through commerce, blood and marriage. The members of these families have permission to cross the border and do so daily for mercantile as well as smuggling reasons.

15. (C) The majority of the illegal immigrants are single males who

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usually sell a cow or other family possession to raise the funds needed to pay the agents. The intending immigrants are then smuggled by offroad vehicles through the border to the isolated and secluded Konarak coast to a boat for transit. The boats are owned and operated by Iranian captains and transit occurs primarily at night in a trip that averages four to five hours. The intending immigrants, with little food or water, sometimes have to wait for days for a boat to be available. Mahmood reported that there have been reports of intending immigrants dying before securing transport from Iran. The Iranian captains travel at full speed and arrive along the beaches of Oman's Batinah coast where they drop their human cargo tens of meters from shore telling them to swim towards "the lights of Dubai". The lightly patrolled Batinah coast stretches 276 miles from Muscat to Hatmat Milalah on the U.A.E. border. Mahmood has seen at least three of the boats used for transit and described them as small crafts, capable of holding 20 to 30 people, which are a hybrid between modern boats and dhows. He reported that the boat captains maintain that they are providing a good service and do not equate their endeavors with smuggling. The Omani coast guard actively patrols the vast Batinah coastline and fires over the Iranian boats when they are intercepted unloading their human cargo.

U.A.E., Work or Detention?

16. (C) At this point, the immigrants are either apprehended by Omani officials, make their way to an Omani city and gain illegal employment, or find their way to the U.A.E. Successfully traveling into the U.A.E. has become much more difficult recently with the completion of the security barrier that fully traverses the Oman-U.A.E. border. Some immigrants have ended up in Omani detention after wandering through the desert for days looking for a gap in the fence before turning themselves into the Omani authorities to obtain food and water. Many do not speak English or Arabic and thus have great difficulties after being abandoned. Their lack of education and language skills and their illegal status in country put them at great risk for exploitation.

Detention

17. (C) Pakistanis that are apprehended by Omani officials are generally taken to the nearest ROP office for formalities, or if along the Batinah Coast, they are taken to the Detention Center in Sohar. Once in detention, the ROP runs fingerprint checks to determine if they have a criminal record in Oman and waits for the results before contacting the Pakistani Embassy. Mahmood then goes to conduct an interview. He must first determine their nationality as they all arrive with out travel papers or identification documents as most destroy these documents after crossing the border into Iran or during the trip to Oman. Those identified as Pakistani will have passports issued to them by the Pakistani Embassy. Mahmood then questions them individually to determine how and by whom they were recruited and the routes they traveled. They remain at the detention center until they are repatriated to Pakistan at Omani expense. During the interviews, Mahmood has discovered Iranian boat captains who had pretended to be Pakistanis in order to avoid capture and arrest by the Omani authorities and continued the pretense in hopes of deportation to Pakistan.

18. (C) Mahmood said that the detention center where they are held is "not good," and does not have air-conditioning but that the Omanis are in the process of moving the detention center to a former prison, with air-conditioning, in Sumail. However, he noted that for most detainees it was still an improvement over their conditions in Pakistan. (Note: He suggested that an Embassy Officer visit the center, saying that access would not be difficult. Embassy will schedule the visit. End Note.) He noted that officials at the center, and other ROP officials that work with the Pakistanis, are generally very respectful and treat the detainees well. The officers look upon the Pakistanis as victims, not as criminals, and thus do not interrogate them. However, Mahmood said that officials at the detention center have been known to strike detainees who "get wise and ask for their rights."

Iranian Interdiction

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19. (C) According to Mahmood, Iran does not spend much effort in regulating the burgeoning human smuggling along its shores. Although he did note that Iran has begun construction of a wall to block access to the most problematic parts of the border with Baluchistan. However, the wall currently covers only 50-60 km of the needed 500-600 km and is easily circumvented by 4X4 vehicles, which is the preferred method of smuggling the intending immigrants to Iran. He also reported that the Pakistani FIA director met with the Iranian Ambassador in Islamabad and implored him to intervene and raid the smuggling staging areas on the Konarak shores. The Iranian response was that they had more pressing priorities as their "hands were full with other security issues." Mahmood also stated that a similar appeal had been made to the Iranian embassy in Muscat. He was hopeful that there would be closer cooperation in the future.

Same Story - Afghanis

110. (C) On August 12, the Afghan DCM told Poloff that Afghanis are traveling the same routes as the Pakistanis to enter Oman. He noted that he must often interview illegal immigrants to determine if they are Afghani. He said he uses his knowledge of the tribal villages along the Afghan border to allow him to determine nationality. He then issues passports to the Afghan nationals

prior to their deportation.

Scope - Attempts and Apprehensions

¶11. (C) It is difficult to determine the total volume of illegals crossing into Oman by sea, and of those the percentage apprehended by Omani officials. In 2008, the Coast Guard detained 7,164 illegal immigrants (ref A) found while still at sea. While specific numbers are unavailable, sources confirm that additional illegals are arrested after coming ashore. Mahmood estimated that 100 to 200 Pakistanis are detained every month and this represents about 30% of the total numbers that make it to Omani shores. In addition to allowing a vulnerable population entry to Oman, this route of entry also provides a security risk to Oman as the human smuggling routes could easily be exploited by terrorists. The extensive coastline of Oman is also a major drug smuggling route from Iran and Afghanistan. (Note: An August 26 U.A.E. press report stated that U.A.E. and Omani anti-narcotics teams foiled an attempt to smuggle drugs from Oman's Dibba coast to the U.A.E. End Note.) These factors were drivers for Oman to sign a security agreement with Iran, the main purpose of which was to cut off the narcotics and people-smuggling route from Iran to Oman (ref B).

Trafficking vs. Smuggling

¶12. (C) Mahmood reiterated several times that he considers the illegal immigrants victims. One of his primary questions was whether they were trafficking victims. Embassy TIP Officer opined that while they were recruited and transported under fraudulent means, since the goal was not to exploit them for labor (but merely to take their money and abandon them) they were not trafficked at the time of their arrival in Oman. This view was confirmed by G/TIP (ref C) who labeled it "fraudulent recruitment." However, while they are not victims of trafficking upon arrival, their vulnerability makes them very likely to be exploited/trafficked after their arrival.

Pakistani Efforts here help Oman and Pakistan

¶13. (C) The information collected by Mahmood during his interviews is used by the Government of Pakistan to populate a database with all agents that are exploiting Pakistani workers. This information is then used to register cases against these agents who are criminally prosecuted in Pakistan. Mahmood wanted additional

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information from the USG to make a case to the Pakistani Government that more offices like his should be established at Pakistani Embassies. He believes that his portfolio should be handled professionally by a specialist with a relevant background. He was surprised that the work he was doing here would be relevant to Pakistan's USG TIP ranking, and very interested in obtaining further information about the TIP Report process and how the tier rankings are created.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: On-going input from a variety of sources paints a consistent picture of the people smuggling situation through Iran to Oman. Oman's effort to cut-off the flow of people smuggling will both increase their security and remove a source of potential trafficking victims. With only five modern poorly maintained vessels in the fleet responsible for interdiction of a 900-mile coastline the size of California's shoreline, Oman continues to be

hampered by lack of sufficient naval and coast guard vessels,
personnel and training to adequately address these issues. END
COMMENT.
HURTADO